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(DEPARTMENT FOR AF/PD (WHARTON, MCCOLLUM, LISENBY), AF/W (VHARPER)

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [KIRCOEXC](#) [ECPS](#) [KCOR](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: BENIN: HAAC Counselor pays courtesy visit to the Public Affairs Officer

11. SUMMARY: On August 24, Moise Bossou, a Law Professor at the University of Abomey-Calavi and one of nine newly appointed Counselors at the Beninese High Authority of Audio-Visual and Communication (HAAC, equivalent of the FCC), paid a courtesy call on PAO Rhonda J. Watson to establish good relationships between the Public Diplomacy Section and the HAAC, discuss the functioning of his institution and to seek possible assistance from the Embassy. Bossou was accompanied by Assanatou Ba Orou, also from the HAAC.

12. During his demarche, Bossou disclosed that Benin is one of 32 members of the Network of the African Communication Authorities (RIAC) based in Cotonou. Bossou said that the HAAC was created in 1994 in the wake of the new democratic era in Benin and in conformity with the constitution, to regulate the functioning of the media. Since its inception, five privately-owned TV stations, 36 commercial radios, 25 non-commercial radios, 6 community radios, and 1136 print media, of which only 16 appear on a regular basis, were created.

13. Although the HAAC is responsible for supervising the functioning of the media, it does not have the necessary equipment to perform its duty. For example, there are 20 private radios in the vicinity of the capital city of Cotonou, but the HAAC has only three listening booths to monitor the news they carry. Also, the HAAC has only one booth for monitoring the programs of five TV stations. This means that the work of monitoring the news simply cannot be done adequately, due to a lack of equipment. Their financial situation is inadequate and the newly appointed HAAC authorities feel that they have no other alternative than to approach generous donors for assistance with training and acquiring new equipment. They also assert that the need for new equipment and the proper functioning of the HAAC will become even more important since Benin will hold another round of legislative and presidential elections in 2011. Bossou claimed that the failure to have adequate control over the functioning of the private media might lead Benin to a chaotic state of affairs.

14. The PAO suggested that he and his colleagues at the HAAC might want to consider visiting the FCC on a Voluntary Visitor program, to learn how frequencies are regulated and to see how the functioning of the media is controlled in the United States. The PAO also suggested that the IRC Director could assist them with doing some research to provide answers to some of their concerns. Bossou concurred with PAO's suggestion, but expressed regret that his institution cannot fund a voluntary visitor program at this point, given that such expenditure was not included in the FY 2009 budget. Bossou added that the HAAC might plan to participate in such a program in the future. The PAO was also agreed with the idea of organizing journalism training programs to assist the reporters, as has been done in the past.

15. Another subject raised by Bossou is the allocation of frequencies to private electronic media by the International Telecommunication Union (UIT). According to him, the granting of frequencies to private media outlets has been temporarily suspended in order to avoid the use of the same frequency by several radio stations located near the borders of neighboring countries. He also noted that there was no mechanism in place for determining which

organizations and religious entities should be accorded a frequency, since all the denominations want to have their own radio station.

¶6. Assanatou suggested that it would be helpful for rural radio stations to receive donations of portable generators to increase the number of hours for programming. The PAO questioned whether it would be likely that such generators would end up being used, instead, in private homes. Bossou agreed with the PAO that there were no controls in place to control the use of donated property, noting that when he assumed responsibilities, there was no furniture in his office because the former Counselors of the HAAC had removed all the equipment and furniture at the end of their tenure. Commenting further on the issue of good governance and corruption, Bossou opined that Benin could already be self-reliant if public funds had not been mismanaged.

¶7. Comments: The Beninese High Authority of Audio-Visual and Communication plays a vital role in regulating the functioning of the media and the training of reporters, most of whom are young university graduates without any basic training in journalism. Bossou's concerns highlight the important role that the Embassy can play in filling a void and capacity building to provide his institution with the tools needed to perform its mandate.

Boustani